

# LIMERICK SOCIALIST

THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER

That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic. —James Connally

## MATT TALBOT SAINT OR SCAB?



## The Great Train Robbery



## 'THE PARISH PUMP'



# THE NEW PHILANTHROPIST

Limerick is not renowned for producing philanthropists. Since Dr. Long was forced out of his Medical Hall at the Catherine Street/ Thomas Street corner over sixty years ago, no local altruist has emerged to take his badly missed place. Students of this subject were therefore taken completely aback by some recent stirrings on the unlikely front of the Limerick soccer scene.

The background to this development was given by the LIMERICK LEADER reporter, John O'Shaughnessy, when he

covered a meeting between the directors and supporters of the Limerick Association Football Club. The meeting was held at the Savoy and the report appeared on the front and back pages of the LEADER on August 24th. The article stated:

*The Limerick A.F.C. board of directors met supporters at the Savoy on this Thursday evening, and pulled no punches in relation to their present financial position.... Chairman, Mr. Billy Higgins, disclosed that the blues had very little cash in the kitty. He explained that if they hadn't sold the controversial mini-bus which the Supporters Club presented to them they may have had to go into liquidation... "We need money... and fast," he added.*

As the meeting went on the discussion centred around the club's financial problem of clearing off the debt due to the Supporters' Club following the sale of the supporters' mini-bus. A sum of £600 was mentioned. The formation of a fund-raising committee was being mooted when a dramatic interjection took place. Jim Leddin, a member of the well-known political family, casually cut in on the discussion to announce that he would personally pay off the £600 debt. "That's the least I can do to help the club," he added.

When the stunned meeting recovered, the chairman, Billy Higgins, promised that the Limerick A.F.C. would pay back the £600 as soon as it was in a position to do so. "That's O.K. ... I don't want it back," the nonchalant Leddin told the bewildered chairman. With this munificent gesture Jim Leddin, who works as a van-driver, put himself into the same league as Lord Peterham, the racehorse owner, who last year gave £750 to the Limerick soccer club.

Philanthropists have traditionally been people such as Andrew Carnegie who appear to suffer pangs of conscience in their old age and use some of their ill-gotten wealth to provide libraries and charity for the people. This mould is now totally shattered by Jim Leddin's intervention into the philanthropic field. As far as is generally known, Leddin's only previous incursion into this kind of financial transaction was when he clubbed together with his brothers to cover off after some of the excesses of his brother, Frank, during his year as Mayor of Limerick.

Meanwhile, it has not been reported if in fact the £600 has yet been handed over. Nor is it known if the new-found benevolence will spill over into other fields besides soccer. For over a decade the Limerick Corporation has been grappling unsuccessfully with the problem of providing a new City Hall and a third bridge over the Shannon. With such a public benefactor as Jim Leddin at large, it should not be long before the Corporation invites him to its next finance-raising committee.

## S.P.S. - AND THE RIGHT TO JOIN A UNION

In May of this year a few workers in S.P.S. decided for a number of reasons to join a Union. The workers felt that as isolated individuals they had no control over their livelihood, no guarantees for wages and conditions and no long term security. In fact everything depended on the "goodwill" of the Company. The goodness of this will has sometimes been placed in doubt, the most recent example being Christmas of 1973.

Following S.P.S. Shannon's best year ever, the workers received only 3 days' bonus, despite Management's promise earlier in the year that the effort asked for and given "would not go unnoticed". In the second example the Management implemented the American-style G.E.A.R. plan without considering the needs or wishes of its Irish workers. The Management has been passing these sort of things off on the workers with the excuse that they are Corporation policy. Yet they seemed to have little difficulty in scrapping the G.E.A.R. plan (Corporation wide policy).

Individual protests on these matters proved fruitless and workers became convinced that only a united voice would carry any weight when talking to Management on any matter.

Since May there has been a steady flow of workers into the Union and now a substantial percentage of the work-force has been organised. A week before the holidays, the organised workers approached the Management through their Union representative and asked for a meeting to discuss wages and conditions. This letter was answered telling us the matter was being attended to. These letters can be seen on request.

One week later, (not counting the holidays) a notice appeared granting what would have been 3 of the Union's demands if the Management had agreed to the meeting. Most workers saw this as an attempt to take the feet from under the Union, an attempt that has failed as workers continue to join the Union at the same rate as before. Soon after the holidays a reminder was sent to the Management to which no reply was received. The Union has now written to the Labour Court about this. S.P.S. policy seems to be that any worker has the right to join a Union, but apparently can make no use of his Union unless the majority of the work-force is in it. We claim that if even only one worker is unionised, he has the democratic right to have his Union representative present when he puts his case to the Management. The reason why the unionised workers are not in the majority now is the practical difficulty in getting in touch with everybody. It is hoped this

leaflet will overcome this.

As well as seeking guarantees on wages and conditions the Union will also claim the following:

1. Right of workers to discuss promotions.
2. Abolition of 40-hour qualification for Saturday overtime.
3. Guaranteed Christmas Bonus.

This statement was written by the trade union members employed at the American Standard Pressed Steel factory at Shannon Airport. Following the printing and circulation of this statement every worker in the factory was interviewed by representatives of the Company's Management in an effort to prevent the spread of trade union organisation within the factory.

## PART ONE

**'The Parish Pump'**

St. Mary's parish has for long claimed for itself the title, of "The Parish". The claim has been enthusiastically pressed by a disparate but dedicated group of "Parish" lovers. The leading publicist of this group has been Willie "Whack" Gleeson, whose frequent and effusive contributions to the local press have played a big part in keeping "The Parish" image alive and kicking. Through the efforts of these propagandists, some stray historical, musical, sporting and business strands have been fondly inter-woven to make up an apparently coherent cultural collage.

But the case for the designation of St. Mary's as "The Parish" has never been documented or proven. The question of what this parish and its people have done to earn the distinction of considering themselves the premier people of Limerick most certainly remains to be answered.

To the casual and uninitiated observer strolling around the city St. Mary's parish presents a run-down, unimpressive appearance and shows few outward signs of being in any way different from the other sections of old Limerick. The observer might ask: in what way are the people living in the area around the Abbey and the Sandmall superior to the people living in Thomonagat and Garryowen? And, it could also be asked, how are the traditions and sporting achievements of "The Parish" more outstanding than the records of these other areas? But when it comes down to actually dealing with questions as mundane as these the "Parishioners" usually prefer to take refuge behind a welter of hazy, nostalgic rhetoric.

A close look at "The Parish" today shows a number of interesting old buildings and an even bigger number of uninteresting derelict sites. Athlunkard Street - known to non- "Parish" people as "Pig Street" - is now but a shabby shadow of its former glory when the street was the home of a confraternity of well-heeled pig-buyers. (The pig-buyers provided a lucrative middle-man service between the farmers and the bacon factories and their halcyon days ended at a time when middle men were only coming into prominence in other industries). Athlunkard Street was also the home of some good rugby players, including the O'Connor brothers and "Pa" Healy, one of the greatest sporting all-rounders ever to come out of Limerick.

Athlunkard Boat Club, fronted by imposing iron gates and Jimmy Quinlan's multi-coloured statue, looks down on the street from its secluded riverside site. The club still produces rowing teams but has seen more successful days. The bar is now by far the most active side of the club's affairs and here between songs and television programmes, the glories of past achievements are chewed over and relived, even by members whose only contact with water is when they pour some into their whiskey.

Down the road along the Sandmall stands another famous "Parish" landmark, Angela Conway's public house. This pub,

the unofficial and off-the-field headquarters of the Shannon Rugby Club and the Mecca for most of the singers of "The Parish", has an atmosphere all its own. Here, every weekend, a familiar ritual is unfolded in the crowded, claustrophobic bar: Shannon's single Munster Senior Cup victory is wistfully recalled, the same old sentimental songs are soulfully sung and an all-embracing fellow-feeling of warmth and security is generated by the combination of alcohol and rugby-lore.

But in political terms "The Parish" culture, with its claustrophobia and conservative harking back to the past, has shown little development. Traditionally a Fine Gael stronghold, with pockets of Fianna Fail support, the short-lived attempt by the Maoists to ginger up the area from their little red bookshop ended in dismal failure in 1971.

Despite the fact that the Bard of Thomond, Michael Hogan, lived for a time in Nicholas Street, "The Parish" is not noted for its literary tradition. It must have come as a surprise, therefore, to students of local literature to find a recent new writing venture emanating from St. Mary's. "The Parish Pump", the cleverly-titled magazine of the St. Mary's Youth Movement, makes interesting reading. The third issue, published on July 28th, shows that old concepts are beginning to be challenged and that new ideas are emerging in the heart of the old parish.

There is some inconsistency and confusion, however, in the magazine's editorials on page two. The editorials deal with two recent events in the area. The first, titled "Death and Neglect", refers to the death by starvation of an old man who lived in Bishop Street.

*A man died in this parish 3 weeks ago. It was not an ordinary death, but one caused by neglect.... There are people living in this parish who have to accept charity from voluntary organisations on the condition that their acceptance is made public. This situation should not exist. There seems to be quite a number of people in the parish who are living in similar conditions. Many of these people will not accept help at the moment. Yet we have a duty to try new methods, new ideas in helping these people. Let's start thinking now, before another death occurs.*

The second editorial is headed, "Decoration Committee", and deals with the decoration of the route from St. John's Cathedral to St. Munchin's College travelled by Dr. Newman following his ordination as Catholic Bishop of Limerick. The fact that a man starved to death in a room in his own house, while the streets outside were being decorated for the new bishop, is not mentioned. Instead the second editorial smugly declares: "The most important lesson to be learned from the preparations is that there is a real community spirit in the parish".

A letter to the editor on page three by a social worker named M.O'Gorman justifiably takes the Corporation to task for its neglect of the Widows' Aims Houses. An article titled "Justice?" on page four reveals that in St. Mary's Parish there are 163 jurors from Corbally and a total of four from the rest of the parish. The population of Corbally is 2,500 and 4,800 live in the rest of the parish. The article correctly draws the class distinction behind these figures and goes on to state:

*The intention was not to divide the parish but to hit at the administration of "justice" in our society which we believe is most unfair.... Why is a man who does not own his own home barred from becoming a juror? We could quote statistics to prove that more working class people on a percentage basis get convicted than do middle class, in our so-called courts of justice, for the same offence. We will do our best to point out injustices in our society in this magazine no matter where they originate. It is not the people of Corbally we are attacking but the legal system which allows such abuses to occur.*

(To be concluded).

# ALLENDE by Cathal Bond

Chile, Chile

Look what you have done,  
Gone and shown the world  
What men have done with guns.  
Your brain hangs dead or floats dead,  
What matter it's your brain  
Canned, contained, disposed,  
Minds manipulated from miles away  
Quenched the spark on that day.

# BEHAN ON TALBOT

Rutland Street ... was mostly tenements. In a back room in one of these lived Matt Talbot, and after his death there was a move on to make him a saint. But Sean O'Casey, who came from that area and lived only a couple of hundred yards from him, refers to him as 'Mad Talbot'. Not only in matters of the theatre, but also in matters appertaining to Dublin, do I bow to the expert.

Matt Talbot, the poor fellow, was some kind of a drunkard until he was about twenty, although I don't think he drank all that much. Amongst other things he did for to get drunk was as he said himself, to have stolen the fiddle from a blind fiddler. When he went off the drink and a big song and dance was made about his conversion from liquor, he got religion in a big way and for years he used to go to Mass every morning at five o'clock.

He worked in timber yards round the docks as a casual labourer and any time in the timber yards he was able, he would go through all sorts of religious exercises and drink off behind the pile of wood to say his prayers.

He also refused his overtime on the grounds that the time spent waiting for the lorries and trucks to come in for unloading should be set against his overtime, which was a fallacious piece of reasoning, because despite the fact that he wasn't actually unloading timber he wasn't standing at the bar of the Shelbourne Hotel either when he was waiting in the cold and damp of a winter's day and the winds of the Liffey blowing through the shipyard.

And he starved himself too. It is said that he used to cook a herring each day and he would boil it up and give it to the cat, drinking the liquid himself.

In 1926, on his way to church, he fell and died and was taken into Jervis Street Hospital. When the nuns came to undress him in hospital they discovered that he had chains cutting into his ~~very~~ flesh to mortify his passions, such as they were. I wouldn't be thinking you could work up a deal of passion on herring water.

However, he became something of a saint but not to the majority of the population in his own area around the north side. But he had a very saintly reputation amongst the middle and upper-classes and even a Presbyterian timber contractor said he was a great man. For the matter of that, I've no doubt that a Protestant timber contractor, or a Mohammedan, or a Jewish, or an atheist timber contractor, would all consider a man a saint if he refused his overtime. He was setting a good example to the rest of the men. However, the majority of his neighbours agreed that if Matt Talbot had had a wife and ten children he could not be affording to refuse his overtime. That was about the height of it.

There are two life stories written about him. One was written by Joseph Glynn who was a prominent Catholic layman and collaborator, and became Sir Joseph Glynn on account of his being one of the few Catholic members of the Dublin Corporation to join in a vote of welcome to King Edward VII when he came to visit Dublin. But he was regarded by a great many people as a 'Castle Catholic' — a particularly detested breed in Ireland — and was considered a very fortunate man to get through the War of Independence with his life.

At the time he wrote his life story of Matt Talbot unionism was still not respectable and he boasted how Matt Talbot was against the general strike of 1913 when the employers of Dublin were widely attacked, even at meetings in London at the Albert Hall by various intellectuals, including H.G. Wells and I will mention our own Bernard Shaw ...

But, according to Joseph Glynn, Matt Talbot held himself aloof from all this strife and averted his eyes from the placards that carried reports of the executions of the 1916 leaders. He certainly did not sympathise with his own people. However times change, and in his latest biography, written by a woman from the County Kilkenny — a school teacher and probably a

farmer's daughter who could not possibly have known anything at all from family traditions about 1913 or 1916 — it appears that Matt Talbot was a staunch trade unionist, trade unionism having become respectable by now.

My father, who is President of the Painters' Union, was once asked in a television interview in Ireland whether he considered Matt Talbot a great trade unionist. 'He was a trade unionist', he replied, 'when he had to be'.

So the unfortunate wretch, for that was all he was — he was like the dog that died; he never did anybody any good but he never did anybody any harm — was held up as an example to the Dublin worker. Whether the employers wanted all the Dublin Workers to boil up herrings and give them to the cat and only drink the water and send their surplus wage, if any, to the foreign missions, I do not know. But in any event Matt Talbot in his own area was and is widely detested.

In 1932, the Catholic Church granted Ireland the International Eucharistic Congress ... just before the start of the Congress in Dublin there was a great hulking up going on in Dublin and housepainters could not be got for love nor money. And there was this contractor who was asked ... if he would ever do up Matt Talbot's room in Rutland Street and leave it exactly as it was when he was in it. So the contractor approaches my father, and knowing my father's rather sketchy ideas about religion he impresses on him the seriousness of the job, and my father agrees to it. He moseyed round to Rutland Street, but after knocking a deal on the door of Matt's room in one of the tenements he turned the handle and found it locked. But Aughtin was not lost, for didn't a woman, on hearing the noise, come to her door to find out if the devil himself was in the building.

My father asked her if she would ever be knowing how to get into Matt Talbot's room?

'For Jesus sake', she said, 'I am trying to rear eight children in one room and my husband is unemployed. Do you think I've nothing better to worry me than Matt Talbot, that old madman?'

So my father explained that he had a job to do and that if he did up the room there'd be thousands coming to see it during the Eucharistic Congress, and that she'd be doing herself a good turn by setting up a little stall outside the door and selling holy pictures and other tokens of her religious respect.

Out like a shot with her, she gave him the name and address of the landlord.

'Don't mention that old bastard to me', moaned the landlord. 'I can't let that fucking room because people are afraid he might appear like a ghost, clanking his chains'.

And my father, on finally opening the door of Matt's room, nearly passes out in a weakness on discovering that his bed, which is famous throughout the annals of Catholic hagiography, is missing.

'Oh, it's you again', says the woman in the next room, and my father, after complimenting her on her eight children and all to that effect, asks about the missing bed.

'Ah, sure' she replied, 'Twas only a block of timber. We burned it during the bad winter of 1931, Mr. Behan, jewel and darling, 'twas either that or the hail door'.

'You'd better get some kind of a bed, Stephen', said the contractor ... 'The best thing you can do', he said, 'is to go down to T. and C. Martin's (one of the timber yards where Matt Talbot worked) and see if they might sell you something that looks like a bed'.

In the heels of the reels, my father was down at the timber yard, and ... didn't he find a lot of railway sleepers off the Great Northern Railway which would exactly do the trick. He picked out one, and after arranging with the foreman to have four inches taken off the top of it for to remove the bolt holes, he asked for it to be delivered up at Rutland Street.

The bed was duly delivered and the woman told him she

Talbot usually arrived at St. Francis Xavier's Church for morning Mass at 5 a.m., if not earlier. While he waited for the church to open at 5.30 a.m., he knelt in prayer on the steps of a nearby convent, or at the iron railings of the church. On wet mornings he refused to take shelter in the doorway, even if asked to do so. Whenever he knelt down he knelt on his bare knees. To facilitate this act he had cut the knees of his trousers lengthways, so that standing up or walking the opening was not easily apparent. He invariably wore an overcoat to hide the cut trousers from the public, and when he knelt down he pulled the coat and trousers aside to leave his knees bare.

On the church door being opened he knelt at the door and bowed the ground. During Mass he never used a prayer book, but prayed with his eyes shut. He knelt erect in the church bench, with his hands clasped together above the rail in front of him. He held this position on Sundays, without support, until about 1.30 p.m. He usually attended twenty-one Masses during the course of a Sunday.

Talbot had a little or no interest in the world around him, and, after having drawn his strike pay, took no part in the big labour lock-out of 1917. A woman who lived at a gate-lodge near where he worked often boiled a kettle of water for his mid-day meal. When Talbot called with his can the woman sometimes tried to engage him in conversation. He would not discuss news or affairs of the day, but always brought the conversation around to the lives of the saints. Talbot made a resolution never to look at placards and carried out this vow right through one of the most turbulent periods of modern Irish history from 1914 to 1922.

Talbot's life remained totally dominated by religion. Apart from his work, and his few hours of daily sleep, all his time was taken up with prayer, visits to churches and the reading of spiritual books. After his death, over three dozen scraps of paper were found scattered through his books on which he had labouriously written down prayers and extracts from spiritual books and versions.

When he was getting old Talbot found difficulty in swallowing dry bread. To enable him to eat the bread without butter, he got his sister, Mrs. Pylan, to boil a whiting and to steep the bread in the water in which the fish was cooked. Talbot's biographer, St. Joseph Glynn, tells us that he did not eat the whiting himself but got his sister to take it home with her.

Towards the end of his life Talbot fell into ill-health and was unable to work. On 26th November 1923, he had drawn 26 weeks' sickness benefit at the rate of 15/- per week from the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. From the 26th November he got a disability benefit at a lower rate of

would never be believing that it wasn't one and the same that had turned so beautiful in the bad cold of that winter, as she showed him where the poor bastard lay. And even my father was charmed with himself as he chose the most abominable-looking holy pictures from a little Catholic repository for to stick around the place. They were all printed in Belgium - mostly by Communists - and were of the Little Flower and the Little Lamp and the Holy Family and the like.

He locked the room and forgot all about Matt Talbot ...

The most elaborate preparations took place for the Eucharistic Congress ... My father, like most Irish people, being ever friendly with foreigners, though not to say nose, spoke to many of them and there was this night in the local when a man who had a certain amount of English tells him that Dublin is a wonderful place and that he has just had a great experience.

'... A spiritual experience, and I have here a relic to prove it'. And he proceeded to take out a clean white handkerchief from which fell a tiny chip of timber. And my father nearly fell out of his standing. 'A chip of timber? A relic?' he exclaimed.

'Yes', said the foreigner in hushed tones. 'Tis from the Blessed man's bed itself. Matt Talbot.

'You, my friend must be mad', said my father. 'It's a piece of a railway sleeper off the Great Northern Railway!'

(Brendan Behan, "Confessions of an Irish Rebel").

**MATT  
TALBOT**  
PART THREE

**SAINT  
OR  
SCAB?**

7s.6d. a week. This sum was not enough to pay for his food, lodging, fire and light and some of his friends came to his financial aid.

After two periods in the Mater Hospital he resumed the wearing of chains and continued, as far as his broken health would allow, his fasts and vigils. In April, 1925, he felt well enough to resume work at his old post in the timber yard. On his way to early morning Mass on Sunday, June 7th, 1925, he collapsed and died. His body was taken to Jervis Street Hospital where it was undressed by two mortuary workers. These men, Charles Manners and Laurence Thornton, made the following statement concerning the condition of Talbot's body:

*On Sunday, June 7th, 1925, a dead body was brought in the Corporation Ambulance to Jervis Street Hospital. On the body being identified, it proved to be Mr. Matt Talbot and when we the undersigned undressed the remains we found chains, ropes and beads on the said body. Around the middle of his waist were two chains and a knotted rope. One chain we took to be an ordinary chain used as a horse trace, and the other a little thinner. Both were entwined by a knotted rope and medals were attached to the chain by cords. Both were deeply embedded in the flesh and rusted. Also on the left arm was found a light chain tightly wound above the elbow, and on the right arm above the elbow a knotted cord. On the left leg a chain was bound round with a cord below the knee, and on the right leg, in the same position, was some heavy knotted cord. Around his neck was a very big beads and attached to same were a great many religious medals. Some of the medals were as big as a half-crown and others ordinary sodality medals.*

(Signed)- Charles Manners, Laurence Thornton.

(To be concluded).

We regret that owing to pressure of space it has been necessary to hold over the rest of this article until next month.

## Engels on Ireland

During a few days that I spent in Ireland, I again realized to what extent the rural population there is still living in the conception of the gentile period. The landlord, whose tenant the peasant is, is still considered by the latter as a sort of clan chief who supervises the cultivation of the soil in the interest of all, is entitled to tribute from the peasant in the form of rent, but also has to assist the peasant in cases of need. Likewise, everyone in comfortable circumstances considered under obligation to help his poorer neighbours whenever they are in distress.

Such assistance is not charity; it is what the poor clansman is entitled to by right from his rich fellow clansman or clan chief. This explains why political economists and jurists complain of the impossibility of inculcating the modern idea of bourgeois property into the minds of the Irish peasants. Property that has only rights but no duties, is absolutely beyond the ken of the Irishman. No wonder so many Irishmen with such naive gentile conceptions, who are suddenly cast into the modern great cities of England and America, among a population with entirely different moral and legal standards, become utterly confused in their views of morals and justice, lose all hold and often succumb to demoralization in masses.

(Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State".)

# THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

## *My share of the Loot*

There was a brief knock at the door of the small cell-like office.

"Come in", I said, and pushed the typewriter aside, glad of the break. The door opened and in walked two of the Great Train Robbers.

"Whatto, Sean". It was the cheerful voice of Brian Field, the solicitor's clerk, convicted of arranging the sale of Leatherslade Farm to the train robbery gang as a hideout. "Time for a brew-up, then?" he asked.

"I was just about to put the kettle on, Brian", I told him.

"It's alright, I'll do it". He grabbed the kettle off the unlit gas ring in the corner and dashed out.

"How's it going, then?" Lennie asked as he sat down.

"Fine", I told him. "Just finished this month's editorial. Got most of the copy stencilled already. Should be running off the entire magazine on the Gestetner this weekend".

"Good on you, mate".

Lennie's name was Field also, but he was not related to Brian. He had been convicted of buying the farm on behalf of the gang. They had both been sentenced to 25 years, but in

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**by SEÁN BOURKE**

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the Appeal Court they had had it reduced to five years on a technicality — a piece of luck which, understandably, they had never quite got over.

After their appeal they were transferred to Wormwood Scrubs from a top-security prison. Lennie was given a job in the kitchen and Brian, the solicitor's clerk, was made trusty in the censor's office. Everything was going fine and then, just over a month ago, on July 8th, Ronald Biggs made a daring escape from the exercise yard at Wandsworth Prison. He was serving 30 years in connection with the same famous robbery. The two Fields were promptly taken off their jobs and confined to D-Hall where they had been washing up in the pantry ever since. Brian Field's former boss, solicitor John Wheeler, was similarly confined to C-Hall. He was in C-Hall because he had only been sentenced to three years, which made him a short-term prisoner.

Brian and Lennie always came to my office for a tea-break in the afternoon, and most evenings we would have a cooked meal together. Brian had somehow acquired a portable record player and we would often spend a quiet Sunday afternoon together listening to his favourite piece of music, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The dramatic opening bars of this piece of music always conjured up in my mind the image of a gang of masked bandits stealthily approaching a hijacked train by moonlight.

Brian came back and put the kettle on.

"It's silly, though, ain't it?" Lennie said. "We're doin' five bleedin' years and they lock us in D-Hall just because Biggs has it away from Wandsworth. As if Brian and me would want to scarp and we only doing five, and half of that done already".

"I'm sure the prison authorities realise there's no need to have you two confined to D-Hall", I said, "but they're under a lot of pressure from angry MPs in the House".

"I was thinking of slapping in a petition to the Home Office", Brian put in. "I think they're taking a bit of a liberty". He turned to me. "If I draft out a petition, will you read through it and give me your comments, Sean?"

"Yes, certainly, Brian", I said.

"Good. I think I'll do it tonight".

Lennie made the tea and poured out three cups.

"Finished down there?" I asked him.

"Yes", he said. "That's the only good thing about the pantry. You finish early".

We sat in silence for a few minutes drinking our tea. Lennie sat against the wall separating the magazine office from the cells, whilst Brian sat with his back to the window that faced

Hammersmith Hospital, a mere hundred yards away on the other side of the perimeter wall, the windows of its nurses' hostel clearly visible from this the third floor of the cell block. The only thing these two men had in common was their connection with the Great Train Robbery. Brian was slim and dark and inclined to be tall, whilst Lennie was of medium height, very stocky, and fair haired.

Brian was articulate, as befitted a solicitor's clerk, and Lennie was a down-to-earth Cockney with no pretensions. Brian was more ready to accept people on the strength of their position or social standing than was Lennie, and was more easily impressed by other criminals' wealth or notoriety. Lennie took nothing for granted. He insisted on making his own assessments and he had that shrewd knack of weighing a man up that is born of necessity. Brian had belonged to a profession where integrity was taken for granted. Lennie had knocked about the West End.

I noticed these differing attitudes to people when Brian and Lennie first got confined to D-Hall. Brian entered my circle straight away, taking it for granted that as editor of the prison magazine I was someone that should be known. Lennie was much less hasty, and when he did finally come up to the office he spent the first hour sizing me up.

"Time to eat", I announced. I put on the frying pan and took three sirloin steaks out of the cupboard in the corner.

"How are the supplies?" Lennie asked.

"Getting a bit low, I think", I replied, examining the contents of the cupboard. "Yes", I said, "not much ham left, and the cheese is nearly gone".

"I better make a list", said Lennie, reaching for a pencil and paper on the desk. "What should we order?"

"Well, some ham to begin with", Brian said.

"We'd better have a couple of dozen eggs, too", said Lennie, "and I think we'll order some more steaks. Can you think of anything, Sean?"

"Tea, perhaps?"

"Yes, of course, we'll have a few pounds". He finished the list and handed it to me. "Give it to Dave if you're passing the kitchen some time tomorrow", he said.

Dave was the kitchen trusty and he supplied us with the goods, for which the account was settled each month. A sum of money would be sent on Lennie's instructions to Dave's wife, who would confirm receipt of the money when she came on a visit to her husband. I had felt a little uncomfortable with this arrangement at first because Lennie, in his very generous way, insisted on paying for most of the supplies. "It's all right, Sean", he had said. "I can afford it". Indeed he could. He had a hundred thousand pounds hidden somewhere in London.

"Well", said Brian, as we sat down to eat, "I've been looking forward to this".

"Me too", said Lennie. "I couldn't eat that shit downstairs".

"I know what you mean", I smiled. "It was sausages for tea".

The sausages at Wormwood Scrubs were home-made to a unique recipe known only to the cooks. They were large and ugly-looking, like the contents of a latrine on a MacAlpine building site. They tasted like sawdust dipped in cowshit and cooked in a slow oven. Most of them finished up in the swill bins.

It was very gratifying for me, as a prisoner, to be sitting in my own private office in Wormwood Scrubs Prison in the heart of London, listening to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and eating sirloin steaks stolen from the prison kitchen, and paid for out of the proceeds of the Great Train Robbery, at the expense of the Bank of England.

There was certainly no need to feel guilty. Some of

Brian's most prominent lawyers waxed rich on the same famous robbery. The trial itself had been a charade. Of course the gang pleaded Not Guilty. Why shouldn't they? Everybody else does. But the Judge and the Prosecuting Counsel knew from the outset that the formidable array of bewigged Queen's Counsel representing the train gang had cost a lot of money. And these defending Counsel didn't bat an eyelid as they accepted their huge fees in used banknotes and then entered pleas of Not Guilty all round.

The whole proceedings reached their lowest depth of cynicism when some of the defending Queen's Counsel started to arrive at the courthouse in stuning new cars even before the trial was half way through. When the trial finally ended, these highly respectable lawyers stuffed their wigs and gowns into their briefcases and, in their new cars, drove back south to their London clubs and their Napoleon brandy, whilst their benefactors, crammed like cattle into a Black Maria, were driven north to Durham Jail for thirty years of sugarless cocoa.

Whenever I thought of the Great Train Robbery trial, it brought to mind the words of William Langland's poem, "Piers Ploughman",

*A hundred men were hovering  
Like hawks in alkem beads,  
Surjeants-at-law they seemed,  
In service at the Bar,  
And pleading at law for usards  
and for petnies.  
Never once for the love of Our Lord  
did they loosen their lips,  
You might betur measure the mist  
on Malvern hilltops,  
Than get a mumble from their mouths  
unless money were shown them.*

Written six hundred years ago, and still relevant.

The cruellest irony of the whole situation was that if the train gang had murdered someone during the course of the robbery the Judge would have had no choice but to sentence them to life imprisonment which, in Britain, means serving nine years. But because they killed no-one, it left the Judge free to impose a "determinate" sentence of 30 years. This is, in practice, three times longer than a "life" sentence.

As Lennie Field put it "Bleedin' marvellous, connit? You rape an' murder someone an' you do nine years. You nick a few sacks of old pound notes on their way to the furnace an' you get thirty years. Funny bleedin' thing, the law".)

We finished our steaks.

"It's handy your having your own office, Sean", Brian said, "very handy indeed. Otherwise we'd starve to death".

"It's very useful being able to bolt the door, too", said Lennie. "You must be the only prisoner in the Scrubs who can lock himself in anywhere. I didn't think they'd allow you to do that for security reasons. I mean, even the toilets have got half-doors so they can see who's in there. You get away with quite a lot really".

"Well, I suppose I do", I said. "But then Wormwood Scrubs has never had a prison magazine before".

"Wormwood Scrubs has never had a Sean Bourke before either", Brian laughed. "They don't know what's hit them".

There was a quiet, almost deferential knock at the door. I slid the bolt back. It was Mr. Evans, the landing officer. He was a decent hard-working screw who did his best to make things as comfortable as possible for the men on his landing.

"Hello, Sean", he said. "Everything alright?"

"Not bad, Mr. Evans", I said. "Come in".

When he saw the remains of the meal he said: "Blimey! Doing well for yourselves, ain't you?"

"It was sausages a la Scrubs for tea", I said, and he laughed. He made no comment at all about the fact that the stuff we had been eating could not be purchased in the prison canteen. But then most of the B-fluff screws would have turned a blind eye. Their attitude was one of live and let live.

"Any chance of a cup of Rosey?" he asked.

"That's Rosey Lee - tea", Brian explained with a grin.

"I know as much bloody Cockney as you do, Brian", I told

him. I poured a cup of tea and handed it to Mr. Evans.

"Thanks, Sean. I needed this. I'm on till ten o'clock tonight. The wife is kicking up a stink, but what can I do? This is my fourth night this week. It's got to be done, though. Got to pay off the old Hire Purchase somehow. Ah, well, it's better than being in jail. Blimey! What am I saying?"

He finished his tea with a laugh. "Well, be seeing you, lads. Must check on the rest of my flock. Thanks for the tea, Sean". He went out onto the landing, shutting the door behind him.

Lennie abruptly switched off Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

"Well, how about a bit of bare tiff?" he asked.

"Why not?" I said. "Brian, turn out the light, will you. Here's a good chap".

"And bolt the door, too", Lennie added.

Brian bolted the door and switched off the light. I then joined the two Great Train Robbers at the office window to gaze across a hundred yards of London's twilight, over the top of the jail's perimeter wall, at the unsuspecting nurses of Hammersmith Hospital.

It was better than nothing.

(Taken from Sean Bourke's forthcoming book, "The Scrubbers", to be published by Cassells, London).

## THE DEATH OF KATE O'BRIEN

On August 13th Kate O'Brien, the finest writer produced by the Limerick middle classes, died in England at Canterbury Hospital. She had been in poor health for the past few years and when she died at the age of seventy-seven years she had few friends and little money. No serious effort was made by the local press to analyse Kate O'Brien's literary work in the articles written about her death. In a brief outline of her writings Joseph H. O'Donnell, in a piece published by the "Limerick Leader" on August 17th, accurately placed Kate O'Brien as a writer when he stated:

*Kate O'Brien wrote with a deep understanding of the milieu of the prosperous middle class family. She wrote with affection for houses and families, the homes that had been built by years of successful trading by the merchants of provincial Ireland. She was and remained a middle class writer...*

Kate O'Brien wrote with an intimate understanding of the people and houses of the Ennis Road and the Catholic convents of Laurel Hill and the Presentation. Despite the sympathetic manner in which she wrote about the prosperous middle class families and merchants and their successful business activities, these people and their political representatives treated Kate O'Brien with scant respect.

Over the past twenty years, Mrs. Mary Hanley, the most indefatigable champion of Kate O'Brien in Limerick, unsuccessfully petitioned four merchant Mayors to grant the Freedom of Limerick to their "own" writer, Ted Russell refused because Kate O'Brien's books were still banned and he feared the reaction from the Redemptorists. The mild Frank Glasgow also shied away from the idea because he claimed the decision would not be unanimous. Vincent Feeney was asked in May 1967 but he believed that the election was far too close for such a controversial matter. Jack Bourke made an effort to do something about the proposal but he, too, failed.

There is some irony in the fact that during Jack Danagher's year as Mayor, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia was given the Freedom, after some successful lobbying by the Jesuits. This ceremony took place a few hundred yards away from Brian Boru House, the Mulgrave Street home of Kate O'Brien.

For all her sympathetic treatment of the Limerick middle classes, the shabby treatment she received in return was more in character and much closer to reality than anything contained in Kate O'Brien's fiction.

ECHOES FROM

- THE -

# BOTTOM DOG

"We must look at life in all its aspects from the point of view of the "Bottom Dog" - the oppressed - be it nation, class, or sex."

VOL. 2. NO. 46. 18TH OCTOBER, 1918 PRICE 1/6D.

## DEMOCRACY

The trend of events is clearly towards democracy. The thrones of Europe are tottering and kings become but figureheads, with a growing conviction amongst the people that, as such, they are more expensive than useful. Even in Germany the process of democratisation has already advanced to the steps of the embattled throne of the Hohenzollerns, and the grasp of despotism and oligarchy has lost its strength. In England the voices of the people have been raised in anger against a Government in the hands of a few which takes little or no account of the rights or the wrongs of the proletariat. France, in name a republic, but in reality a tyranny exercised by a Godless oligarchy, is quick with a spirit which demands the application of the principle that no Government has a right to exist unless it rules by the people and for the people. Some Colonies of the British Empire maintain some last vestiges of the prepotence of tyranny, fast disappearing, yet strong enough to pass laws to carry out regulations which are against the will of the majority, and still arrogant enough to embark on a course in spite of the discontent and manifest hatred which they arouse. Ireland remains in this latest hour a victim to the worst form of despotism ... The people are awakening. The men who fight and work and suffer know they have no voice in the determination of affairs which control their lives. A little while longer and the rule of the people will have become a reality and the day of the profiteer and the despot and the creation of wealth by the sweat of the poor will have ended.

Democracy is a word lightly used by politicians today; in common language it means the supremacy of the people. The famous Gettysburg phrase, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people", brings us close to its true significance ... The main principle of democracy is the equality of man, and in democratic doctrine it is equally clear.

- (1) That every citizen is equal before the law, and that the rights of all are safeguarded by the State, and
- (2) That every citizen ought to be given equality of opportunity, and that no man be unduly handicapped on account of birth and poverty.

Corollaries of democratic rule are such institutions as a free Press, liberty of speech, universal suffrage, fair parliamentary representation for all, the employment of a referendum where the will of the people is doubtful. The equality of man must be respected, and civil and political freedom granted to all.

Looking at the question from another point of view, Democracy stands for the rights and the dignity of man regarded as an individual, and opposes the conception that man is for the State, and not the State for man. It means the overthrow of tyrannical interference with higher rights, and the establishment of authority, which is conscious that its ends and aim and scope are limited by the general good of the people. Therefore a true Democracy is an ideal we can all welcome and look forward to with hope. It is the ideal which, once realised, would be far more effective in preventing wars than a million peace conferences. It would for ever put it out

of the power of a few arrogant politicians to plunge the population of a country into a war without first consulting those whom the war effected most.

No profiteering, no tyranny, no laws passed against the will of the people, no irresponsible squandering of public money by persons who refuse to account for it, no engineering of sectarian differences on the part of politicians whose political incapacity has written their death-warrant. For all this, and for all the prosperity and peace it would entail, Democracy stands. A dream, one will say, Nay, more than a dream - a reality which is marching apace towards realisation. The interested parties will fight to a finish; the corrupt politicians, the carrion crows, who will retain their ill-gotten goods of plunder no matter what the fate of the poor; all these will be obstacles on the road to full freedom. But it is coming. The slaves of centuries are awake and breaking their fetters. The day of reckoning is at hand.

VOL. 2. NO. 47 25TH OCTOBER, 1918 PRICE 1/6D

## PHILANTHROPY GONE MAD

The innocent reader of the Capitalist "Chronicle", after reading Matt Russell's long epistle, would say: "What robbers these bad Limerick bakers are! They want to rob us!" According to Matt, the citizens must be made aware of the fact, if they do not already recognise it, that embryo Carnegies are in our midst in the shape of the masterbakers; and it luckily happens that this demand of the operatives furnishes an excellent means of setting forth to the public this up-to-date and figures-on-paper-proved truth(?) without unduly causing the donors to feel uneasy at the stupendous amount of praise let forth from the floodgates of adulation to carry them off their feet. Oh, for a Roll of Honour on which to inscribe in letters of gold these unknown, unhonoured, and unsung philanthropists of the Bread Combine.

But, gentle reader of the B.D., are you aware that Matt and his gang were beaten before the arbitrator last January on the same case he now presents to the public? He was not able to throw dust in that man's eyes, as he is endeavouring to do to the public now. The Roll of Honour should rather be a Black List, the persons on which should be marooned on an island in the ocean from which the pestilence of greed could not spread; and the letters of gold are the unjust profits purged out of the bakers in their Turkish bath unsanitary bakehouses, to which the goodly sun and air are banned, barred, and forbidden fare. But the Dog has more to say on this. Listen! Perhaps you are not aware of the attempt made by refusing to sell flour to the fair bakehouses by this Combine of millers and bakers, to starve the city. Yes! Starve and die, ye dogs, you vermin of the earth! How dare you! A deputation of Bakers, I.T.W.U., Carmen and Storemen, Stationary Engine Drivers and Firemen and the President of the Trades Council heard of this, and, fearing the consequences, interviewed Mr. G. Goodbody on the subject, who frankly avowed he was another T. Unionist and was in this Combine to deny the bakers their right to live, and - oh, Charity and Christianity! - starve the poor. This is what we are up against, and the B.D. has often told you so. When will the awakening come?